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E. Buchanan Baxter, M.D.

Born 1844.

Died 1885.

In Memoriam.

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EVAN BUCHANAN BAXTER,

M.D. LOND., F.R.C.P.

EVAN BUCHANAN BAXTER was born in 1844 at St. Petersburg, where his father, James Baxter, had resided for some years as a high official in the Education Department of the Russian Government Service. His father, a personal friend of Christopher North, was descended from an old Scotch Presbyterian family. In early manhood he had removed to Russia, and there married a Miss Ross, the daughter of a Scotch merchant who had settled in St. Petersburg, and of this marriage a daughter, who died in infancy, and Dr. E. B. Baxter were the only children. His mother died whilst he was still very young. His father also directed the English school at St. Petersburg during his residence there, and here Evan began his education. Soon afterwards, on being appointed Government Inspector of Schools in the province of Podolsk, Russian Poland, his father took up his residence at Kaminetz, where Evan was brought up and educated until the age of sixteen under the care of his parent and an old French tutor. To this early training, so different from that of an English public school-boy, many of the characteristic elements in his thoughts and actions must be ascribed. In October, 1861, he came to England, and entered the General Literature and Science Department of King's College. At that time he was a good English, German, French, and Russian scholar, and had read and appreciated most of the best literature in those languages, and had also a good knowledge of many of the Latin classics. He was then quite unacquainted with Greek. A friend writes, "He and the late Professor Clifford joined about the same time as myself, and both showed them-

selves distinctly superior to the rest of us." This was in one of the most flourishing periods in the history of the General Literature Department of King's College. In 1862, having made rapid progress in Greek history and literature, he obtained an open scholarship in classics at Lincoln College, Oxford, and stayed there for three terms. His college tutor was the present Professor Nettleship; and his intimacy with his tutor's brothers and family remained close and cordial until his death. His great ambition then was to become a classical scholar and Fellow, for which his linguistic accomplishments singularly well fitted him. His university career, however, was interrupted by the prolonged illness and the death of his father. He returned to Russia to nurse and attend him. On coming back he felt that he could not resume his place in College —for his scholarship had lapsed in his absence—even if his views had not undergone very material changes in the interval.

Before leaving England, and whilst in Russia, he had studied deeply philosophical literature and the doctrines of the Positive school; and this, with other circumstances, determined him not to return to Oxford. "The only profession," he said, that attracted me was that of medicine, holding out as it did an opportunity for the study of physical science and a hope of comparative intellectual freedom." And so in October, 1864, he entered the Medical Department of King's College, and obtained the first Warneford Scholarship on his entrance. In 1865 he was elected a junior scholar with the late Professor A. H. Garrod and Professor Curnow, and in 1869 gained the first Warneford Prize. Whilst in the Medical Department, in 1865, he was awarded the Dasent Prize (open to the whole College, for an essay on some historical or literary subject which should be distinguished by accuracy of composition and elegance of style, and usually won by students in general literature). The subject for the essay was "The Minor Poems of Milton." In 1868 he was appointed assistant house-physician to King's College Hospital, and 1868-69 he filled the office of

house-physician. In 1870 and 1871 he became Sambrooke Medical Registrar to King's College Hospital; and the conscientious exactitude with which he performed his duties was blended with such unobtrusive kindness in unofficially teaching his juniors that he is most gratefully held in remembrance by them as an example of what a typical senior student may do in such a position. It was at this time that he began to be appreciated as not only a man of the first intellectual calibre, but also as a great teacher and an extraordinarily careful clinical observer.

In 1865 he matriculated in honours at the University of London; in 1866 and 1867 he passed the Preliminary Scientific and First M.B. Examinations; and in 1869 graduated M.B., obtaining the Scholarship and Gold Medal in Medicine and the Gold Medal in Midwifery. In the next year, at the examination for the M.D. degree, he was marked with a star as worthy of the Gold Medal for General Proficiency.

In 1871 Dr. Baxter was appointed Medical Tutor at King's College, and he held this post until 1874, when he was chosen as the successor to Professor Garrod in the chair of Materia Medica and Therapeutics, and as an assistant physician to King's College Hospital, and these offices he held until a month or two before his death. In 1872 he became a Member of the Royal College of Physicians, and in 1877 was elected a Fellow. (He had been elected an Honorary Fellow of King's College two years previously.) He was subsequently appointed an Examiner in Materia Medica and Therapeutics, and he also filled for five years the corresponding office in the University of London. Whilst still tutor to King's College he was elected on the medical staff of the Evelina Hospital for Sick Children on its foundation, and he worked diligently but unostentatiously at the diseases of children for the next nine or ten years, first in the out-patient rooms and then in the wards. In the intervals between his medical classes he translated Rindfleisch's "Pathological Histology" for the New Sydenham Society, edited the fourth edition of Garrod's

"Essentials of Materia Medica," and made some valuable experiments with the "Cinchona Alkaloids on Bacteria and Colourless Blood-Corpuscles," which were published in the *Practitioner* in 1873. His accurate knowledge of technical pathology and his choice incisive English enabled him not only to give a faithful translation of Rindfleisch's work, but to present English readers with a more readable book than the original, and marked by an elegance of style such as is rarely met with in a translation of a German scientific work. In his edition of Garrod's "Materia Medica" he preserved every characteristic which has made this text-book so popular, and he added to it many notes on physiological therapeutics, so that for accuracy and conciseness it still stands pre-eminent. Subsequent researches have scarcely modified any of Dr. Baxter's careful statements. His experiments on bacteria and the colourless blood-corpuscles show his excellence as a microscopical observer, and were remarkable for their originality, precision, and completeness, and for the painstaking labour which they must have involved. In consequence of these researches he was asked by the Medical Officer of the Privy Council to carry out a series of inquiries, on the same lines as the preceding, into the value of disinfectants, and his results were embodied in the Report for 1875. In a review of his paper in this journal on April 1st, 1876, it is remarked, "Dr. Baxter has been enabled to arrive at definite quantitative results as to their efficacy against the different poisons, and thus to supply us with most important experimental data on which to found our disinfectant operations."

In the next year he wrote an article in the *British and Foreign Medico-Chirurgical Review* on the vaso-motor nervous system, which showed a complete mastery of the history and position of the subject at that time. In it he pointed out how far our hypotheses were from including all the facts in this branch of physiology, and how great must be our caution before we invoke its aid in explaining our daily clinical and pathological phenomena, and the modes of operation of our

therapeutical agents. His large and accurate knowledge of skin diseases, derived from many years' work at the Blackfriars Hospital, at first under the instruction of Mr. Jonathan Hutchinson, is demonstrated in the paper on "General Exfoliative Dermatitis," which he contributed to the *British Medical Journal* in 1879. His lesser writings include a series of physiological notes with which he supplied the *Academy* for many years, and these are remarkable for their condensation and the clearness with which difficult and complex questions are placed before the general reader. He also reviewed some biographical works for the same journal. In March, 1880, in conjunction with Dr. Willcocks, then medical registrar to King's College Hospital, he published a series of observations on the number of red corpuscles in the blood, and their chromometric value in health, acute febrile diseases, chronic diseases, and in those pathological conditions in which the blood is either the primary seat of the morbid process, or, at any rate, the theatre of its most conspicuous manifestations. Here, again, the charm of precision and of an exact quantitative procedure is well shown. A short note in *Brain* of January, 1884, welcoming the appearance of a Russian review devoted entirely to Neurology, was his latest literary work. In 1874 he married a lady who had been a nursing sister in the Franco-German war and in King's College Hospital, who survives to mourn her sad loss.

In 1881 Dr. Baxter was appointed Physician to the Royal Free Hospital, and the charge of instructing the lady pupils in clinical medicine was placed in his hands. He performed the duties most devotedly, fully believing that our profession should be open to both sexes, and the ladies could scarcely have had another physician as a teacher who would have so well combined courtesy and gentlemanly feeling with the knowledge of a thorough all-round clinical physician and the skill of a practised teacher.

Dr. Baxter attended most assiduously to his duties at the Council of the Pathological Society, at the Medical Board

of King's College, and at Committees on Therapeutics at the Royal College of Physicians; but he was an infrequent visitor at the general meetings of our Medical Societies. The principal occasion on which he took an active part in the proceedings was in the debate on Rickets, at the Pathological Society in 1880. We may recall his appearance as a speaker unknown to a large number of his audience. A tall, delicate gentleman, of somewhat fragile physique, with a slight but perceptible stoop, well-proportioned and well-poised head, with dark hair turning grey, falling straight and smooth, and somewhat thinly scattered. His forehead was high and square, and clearly betokened a markedly intellectual and thoughtful mind; while the delivery of his well-balanced sentences accentuated the impression that a speaker above the ordinary was engaging the attention of his audience. His deep-set, penetrating, bluish-grey eyes, hidden by spectacles, his long aquiline nose, delicately shaped ears, small nervous lips, and finely cut chin, with a small moustache and whiskers, and an elongated squarely-cut beard tinged with grey, gave a characteristic Oriental rather than English cast to his appearance. His profile, especially when lit up by a smile, was strikingly handsome. He had fine hands, with long tapering fingers and filbert nails, and small feet. His presence was altogether most striking, and can hardly be fairly depicted to those to whom he was personally unknown. At that meeting he gave proofs, with his accustomed precision, that starch-feeding in 92 per cent. of the cases observed by him at the Evelina Hospital had preceded rickets, but he also pointed out the objections against the hypothesis that this was its only cause. The rigorous deductions that he drew from all his observations, and the cautions that he enforced against their absolute adoption, cannot be better shown than in this address.

We would supplement this description of how he appeared to his medical contemporaries by noticing some characteristics well known to all who were his personal

friends. In investigating a clinical case, Dr. Baxter was most methodical : he first heard the personal history, inquired into the family history of the patient, and afterwards made a thorough physical examination. It was only then that he came to a conclusion as to the diagnosis, and he pursued the same method however trivial the case might seem to be. He was as minute and thorough in laying down the plan of treatment, and he insisted on every detail which he ordered being systematically followed. After he had examined a patient, he became dogmatic as to the nature of the disease, and the requisite regimen and diet which would cure it or alleviate its symptoms, and it was remarkable to see how implicitly his patients carried out his wishes and how thoroughly they believed in his prescience and judgment. The method which he adopted for ascertaining the nature of the affections for which his private patients consulted him was carried by him into hospital practice. Here, also, his examination was most thorough and his directions for treatment most precise, and it is especially in this particular that all who began to investigate and treat diseases under his supervision at King's College and the Royal Free Hospitals will have to recall his memory with lively feelings of gratitude. He exhaustively examined every case under his care. In addition to being a well-trained general physician, he was a well-versed specialist in cutaneous and nervous diseases, and could use the ophthalmoscope and laryngoscope with easy familiarity, whilst his knowledge of therapeutics and physiology was almost unique. As a lecturer, we need only say that students often attended his lectures on Materia Medica twice, and even thrice, so great was the attraction of his style, and so clear was his exposition of the many details embraced in his course of lectures.

His personal gifts were so numerous, his courtesy so like a remanent from a former generation, his humour so marked and yet so grave, that all who came within the boundaries

of his charmed circle distinctly felt better men from being influenced thereby. A physician after the type of Graves and Trousseau; a *littérateur*, whose exquisite and well-balanced periods were chosen from an accurate knowledge of Dante, Goethe and Schiller, Turgénieff, Voltaire, Corneille and Racine, Chaucer, Spenser, Milton and Addison, besides the most important Latin and Greek classics and the best modern English writers; a scientist, with accurate information as to the history of modern medicine; and a man, modest and retiring, ever giving place to others, and whose acquaintance was the joy of a select number of friends,—such is a bald estimate of the man who has just passed away.

The history of his illness is briefly as follows:—He was always delicate, and early in his English life suffered from bronchitis; his digestive powers were feeble, and for many years he had suffered occasionally from attacks of intestinal colic, which increased in frequency before his fatal illness. In February, 1883, he felt weak and out of sorts, and unable to do his work as well as formerly, and towards the end of that month he was laid up with right pleurisy, with some effusion, from which he slowly recovered and was able, but with difficulty, to lecture in the summer session of 1883; in September the intestinal trouble became rather urgent and continued so throughout his life. In January, 1884, an attack of left pleurisy set in, but he again lectured throughout the summer session. In the autumn there were signs of breaking down at the apices of the lungs, and these were soon followed by albuminuria. Œdema of the legs was noticed in November, and late in December diarrhœa, almost uncontrollable, left him but little remaining strength. On the 12th inst. attacks of dyspnœa began, suggesting cardiac thrombosis, and these continued until his death, early on the 14th. He was quite conscious until a few minutes before his decease.

In conclusion, the first element of his character and the mainspring of his life and actions cannot be better expressed than in a quotation from the letter of an old friend. "I

never knew him hint, or say, or suggest the slightest toleration of anything but what was honest, honourable, and just. He was without exception the *most accurate* man I ever met. I never knew him state anything as a fact which was not the fact and capable of verification. He was never inexact or exaggerated." His views on medical questions are clearly stated in an address to the King's College Medical Society in 1870 on Medicine and the Allied Sciences. "The advancement of medicine at the present day depends mainly on *scientific investigation* — on investigation conducted according to the received methods of biology; *the perfecting of the individual practitioner* in clinical study. With the latter, science has little or nothing to do; with the former, its connexion is most intimate." His elegance of style, precision in the choice of words, and wide culture may be gathered from the concluding sentences of that address: "To nearly all of us it is an educational instrument in the widest sense—our only chance of culture. To nearly all of us, medicine is not only an occupation, but a life. And in the recognition of this, that our occupation and our life are one, lies at once the acknowledgment of our shortcomings, and a ground of hope for further action. Stronger motives than those of mere ambition or curiosity stimulate us to exertions which, but for them, would seem too hard. The mastery over the past is of no avail, save as it gives us a key to the future. We should be like those early voyagers who, starting from their well-known home in some northern island, were drawn ever onward by the vision of some mythic El Dorado or Fountain of Perpetual Youth. This, indeed, they never reached; but in their passage through warmer seas, into the atmosphere of the unknown, they were not left without reward, for every morning brought with it new horizons; every night, new stars."

J. C.